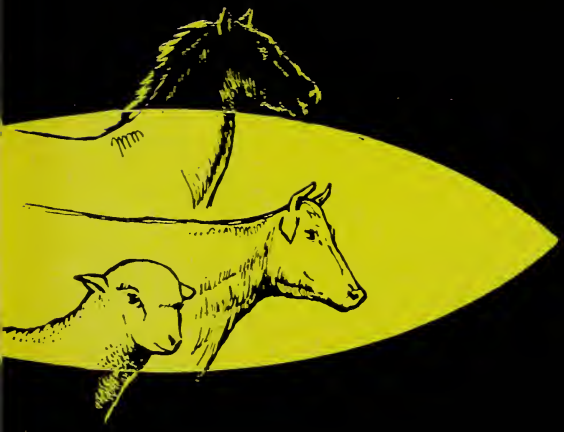
REDUCING LIVESTOCK LOSSES from Greasewood POISONING in the Western States



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

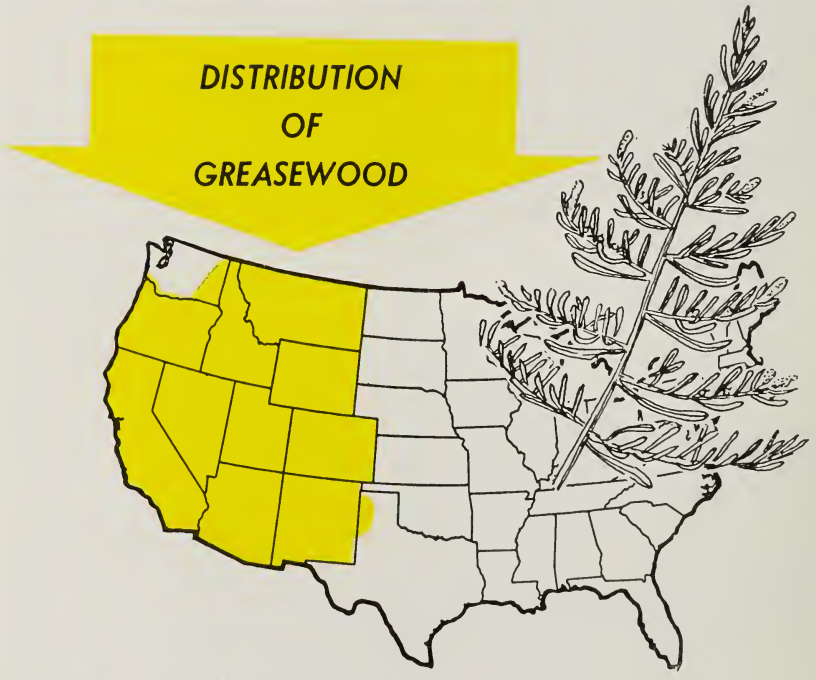
REDUCING LIVESTOCK LOSSES from Greasewood POISONING in the Western States

Greasewood,[1] a perennial shrub of the western range States, is a good forage plant when cattle eat it in moderate amounts with other forage, but it may be highly toxic. It is especially toxic for sheep, when they eat it in large amounts with little or no other feed. The toxic substances are sodium and potassium oxalates, which are found in the leaves and other aboveground portions of the plant. Greasewood increases in toxicity as the growing season advances.

Where and When It Grows

The plants grow principally in the heavy saline to saline-alkaline soils of semiarid regions. They are found on the flood plains, along dry washes and gullies, and in other areas where the soil is sufficiently moist. Greasewood starts its growth in early spring. The leaves remain succulent until fall, when they freeze and dry.

[1] *Sarcobatus vermiculatus.*



Plant sketch from W. C. Muenscher, Poisonous Plants of the United States. The MacMillan Company, 1951

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Greasewood is 2 to 5 feet tall, and has rigid, spiny branches. The bark is smooth and white, and the leaves are narrow, thick and pale green. The flowers are small and light green to whitish. The plant belongs to the goosefoot family.

How It Affects Livestock

A sheep may die if it eats about 2 pounds of green leaves and fine stems in a short period without other forage. Symptoms of poisoning may develop 4 to 6 hours after the animal eats a toxic dose.

Early symptoms include:

1. Dullness
2. Loss of appetite
3. Lowering of the head
4. Reluctance to follow the band

Advanced symptoms include:

5. Drooling and a white froth about the mouth
6. Nasal discharge
7. Progressive weakening
8. Rapid and shallow breathing
9. Coma

How To Reduce Livestock Losses

Livestock losses can be reduced by (1) providing a range that supports other forage, and by (2) keeping hungry animals away from greasewood ranges at all times. Supplemental feeding may be beneficial, especially while the animals are being trailed or after they have been shipped long distances.

There is no effective treatment for greasewood poisoning, and eradication of the plant is not practicable.

Where To Obtain More Information

You can obtain more detailed information on greasewood poisoning by getting in touch with your county agricultural agent or by writing to your State agricultural experiment station or to the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Consult your local veterinarian if you have any questions regarding affected animals. *Note:* The map on page 2 shows areas where most livestock poisoning has been reported. It is possible that greasewood grows in other areas.

Know Poisonous Plants • Reduce Livestock Losses

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